

CHAPTER XIII: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Where was it?

Reno stared into the darkness around him. He couldn't see anything. No walls, no ceiling, no light at all. It was pitch dark. He couldn't even see the floor beneath his feet. Yet he was running. He didn't know where he had come from, or where he was going. He was looking for something, but he had no idea what. He was searching, frantically. He had to find it, and he had to find it soon.

He ran on, getting more desperate by the moment. Not caring where he was going. But there was nothing. No matter which direction he went, all he saw was blackness. He knew he was running out of time. If he didn't find her soon, it would be too late.

Her? Who was it he was looking for? He thought he knew, or should know, but for some reason the answer eluded him. He wasn't sure who he was looking for, or why. The only thing he knew was that if he didn't find her soon, something horrible would happen.

But he couldn't find her. She wasn't here. He looked around desperately, but there was nothing in sight. He didn't know where to go, which way to turn. Already it might be too late. Already she might be dead.

A sound. From far off. He could barely hear it. It was her. She was calling him.

He spun around, searching for the direction the voice was coming from, but he couldn't tell. It was far off. He could barely hear it. She was calling him. She was screaming his name. She needed help. She needed him. Where was she?

"Rory!" he yelled.

He was in a room. It was dimly lit by a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. The walls of the room had been covered with a floral print wallpaper, but it was so faded as to be barely legible. There was a long tear in it running from the ceiling halfway down to the floor near one corner of the room. There was a dresser, its natural wood finish faded and scratched, and a bed covered with mismatched blankets. The blankets lay on the bed in disarray, some of them strewn on the floor. The nearby window was broken, letting a slight breeze that brought with it the fetid odor of the narrow alley outside.

His sister's room.

"Rory!" he called out again.

He looked around, searching desperately for her, but she wasn't there. He could still hear her calling him, her small voice more desperate than ever. She was screaming for help. She was in pain. The sound tore a hole in his heart. But she wasn't here. He couldn't help her.

Shards of glass lay strewn across the floor from the broken window. A thin line of red ran down the wall from the windowsill.

He ran to the window. He could see the trash filled alley outside, but there was nothing else there. There was no sign of his sister.

She screamed.

He was outside. Somewhere in the streets of Midgar. He was running once again. And although he could see where he was going now, he still didn't have any clue where Rory was. He had to find her. All they had was each other. He would look out for her. He had promised.

A light above him caught his attention. He looked up. The moon had risen from behind one of the dark buildings. A young man stood on the roof, outlined in the light. Although he was too far away to recognize Reno knew it was one of the members of his gang. The boy pointed to the left.

Reno turned. A building stood on a hill, even though there were no hills in Midgar. Yet somehow Reno knew that was where his sister was.

The hospital.

He stood in front of a bed. A small figure lay in front of him. Her bruised and battered countenance barely visible beneath the bandages and the tubes that ran from her body. Behind him he could hear the slow beeping of a heart monitor.

"You don't have any insurance?"

A voice. The sound of the nurse. A voice as cold as ice.

Reno shook his head dumbly.

"Life support costs 1500 gil a day. How are you going to pay for it?"

Reno stood there, looking down at his little sister. She was only twelve years old. She was just a kid. How could this happen to her?

"I don't know," he heard himself saying.

"Do you have any gil?"

"No."

The voice was like a knife stabbing through him.

"There aren't any charity hospitals in Midgar. We can't provide care unless you can pay for it. If you can't pay, we'll have to shut off the respirator."

Reno felt as if he were going to throw up. They had to keep the life support on. She'd die without it. They couldn't just let her die, could they? She was just a kid!

"Please you've got to help her. You can't let her die."

"You have to pay. There's no charity in Midgar. If you can't pay, there's nothing we can do. We can't run the respirator on nothing."

The voices were all around him now, raining down on him, forcing him to his knees like blows.

And far away, almost drowned out, the shrill desperate voice of his sister.

"Help me Reno. I don't want to die. Please. I don't want to die!"

"I'll get the gil somehow!" Reno cried out. "I don't know how, but I will. Just please don't shut it off. Don't let her die. I'm begging you!"

"You don't have the gil. You can't get it. You live in the slums. You have nothing. No one cares about you. You're both just street scum."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Reno screamed, clutching his head and closing his eyes.

And abruptly, there as silence. The voices were gone. The room was dark, but not completely. He didn't want to look up. He didn't want to see what was before him. But as if of their own will, his eyes opened and his head rose.

Rory's bed was still in front of him. But it was dark now. The small figure still lay it. But the machines were silent. Everything was completely still.

"No," he said softly.

A single dim light cast it's stark illumination on the bed. His sister lay there. The tubes were gone. He could see the bruises on her face now, but they didn't seem to matter anymore. She looked so small, so frail, lying there in the bed. Her eyes were closed. She wasn't moving. Her chest did not rise and fall. No breath passed her lips.

"Oh God no," he moaned.

His head dropped, looking down at his hand in front of him, and the electrical cord that it held.

"No, no, no, no, NO!"

Reno's whole body jerked. He looked around, having no idea for a moment where he was. The room looked totally unfamiliar. There was a bed here, but it was not in a hospital, and he was the one laying on it. A small light in the ceiling lit the room, but there was nothing else here save the gray walls and steel door.

His cell. That's where he was. Where he had been the last three days. His cell in Vanguard headquarters in Gongaga.

He sat up, his feet dropping onto the cold floor. He brought his trembling hands up to his head.

God, he needed a beer. He felt like his head was going to split open. He hadn't had a dream like that in years. Right after it happened it was all he ever dreamed about. It had taken months before the nightmares had finally faded. But they had. Why had it suddenly come back to him now?

Without thinking his hand slipped into his pocket. He pulled out his key chain. His hands settled in his lap, staring at the keys and the only other small item on the chain, a tiny pocketknife. It wasn't even half an inch long, not even threatening enough for the guards to have taken it away from him. She had given it to him as a gift. She hadn't bought it, of course. They hadn't had any gil for that. Most of the time they hadn't even had gil for food. She told him she had found it, but it was more likely she had stolen it. Not that it mattered. It was the last thing she had ever given him. Just a couple of months before she had been killed. His only remembrance.

He realized his eyes were moist.

He stood up abruptly, shoving the key chain deep into his pocket. He clenched his fists, so hard his nails dug into the palms of his hands.

"Goddammit!" he snapped.

What the hell was the matter with him? It had been years ago. She was dead, and there was nothing he could do about it. So get over it already! He had learned a long time ago that life didn't give anyone from the slums of Midgar a break. And that was fine with him. He didn't need any help, from God or anyone else. No matter what life threw at him, he was going to chew it up and spit it back. He wasn't going to let anyone or anything beat him!

The sound of footsteps outside snapped him to attention.

He sat down on the bed, taking a moment to compose himself. By the time the door swung open, his face held it's usual smirk.

Mr. Van Cleff stepped into the room, followed by two burly guards.

"I don't remember calling for room service," Reno quipped.

Van Cleff didn't reply. He stepped into the center of the room and looked at Reno while the two guards stopped beside the door.

"We've captured some of your friends," Van Cleff said.

"Oh really?" Reno replied, sounding extremely bored. "And who might that be?"

"Oh no one important really," Van Cleff replied. "Just a few members of Avalanche."

"Avalanche?" Reno said dismissively. "Whatever gave you the impression they were my friends? I couldn't care less what happens to any of them."

"Is that so?" Van Cleff said slowly.

"Yes it is," Reno replied. He stood up, keeping a bored expression on his face. "Just because we've worked together on occasion doesn't make us friends. As far as I'm concerned, they're all just a bunch of losers who, through sheer luck, happened to beat Sephiroth and save the world. Kind of like winning the lottery, you know? So if you think I'm going to get all upset about them being captured, I'm afraid you've got another thing coming."

"Well, that's interesting news," Van Cleff replied after a moment. "But you know, I really think you should be concerned about this."

"And why is that?"

"Because, the President was holding onto you as a possible bargaining chip. With Avalanche, as it turns out. But from what you say, if you really aren't friends, it looks like you wouldn't be much of a bargaining chip after all. But even if you were friends, it doesn't matter anymore. Now that we have some members of Avalanche, we don't really have any reason to hold on to you. I'm afraid you've outlived your usefulness."

Reno almost frowned, but managed to keep his face impassive, even after he saw the gun appear in Van Cleff's hand.

"I've waited a long time for this," Van Cleff said. "I wanted to get rid of you right off the bat, after what you did to me. But I'm a businessman. I wasn't going to let something as petty as revenge get in the way of what we are trying to accomplish. I have to tell you though, you have no idea how happy it made me when the President gave me to okay to kill you."

Reno didn't reply. He kept his face a mask, not giving away anything he was thinking. But his mind was racing furiously. He hadn't expected this. When they hadn't killed him right away he figured he was safe. He figured they had some plan for him, that he had time to figure a way out. But in the few days here he hadn't been able to come up with anything. Everything here was monitored. No one ever came into his cell alone. He had seen no chance at all to escape.

And now it looked like he was out of time. The gun was already leveled on him. Van Cleff wasn't close enough for him to jump without being shot first. And the two guards were also armed. It didn't look like he would stand a chance if he tried anything, but then again, if he had nothing else to lose he'd certainly make an attempt. If was going to go down, he was going to go down fighting.

But in order to have any chance at all, he'd have to get a little closer.

"That may not be such a good idea," he said.

"I think it's a very good idea," Van Cleff countered.

"I may not be friends with Avalanche, but like I said, we have worked together," Reno continued. "I know a lot about them. A lot of information that might prove useful."

Van Cleff just smirked.

"Do I detect and attempt to grasp at any straw to remain alive?" he said, quite accurately. "I told you already, we have some real members of Avalanche now. If we need information, we can get it out of them. We don't need you."

"Yeah but you might find that they're a bit harder to pry information from than you hope," Reno replied. "Whereas, I'll tell you what you want to know willingly."

"If we spare you life," Van Cleff finished.

"Well, yes. I don't think that would be too much to ask."

Van Cleff smiled.

"Really Reno, you're starting to sound pathetic. But perhaps we can work something out. I might find it in my heart to spare your life, if you begged me."

Reno just stared at him.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Van Cleff said. "Do you want to live or not? Go ahead, get down on your knees and beg."

Reno's face didn't give any hint of what he was thinking. He had no intention of begging in front of this man. Of in front of anybody. He'd only begged once in his life, and he'd promised himself he'd never do that again.

Besides, there was no doubt in his mind that whatever he did, Van Cleff had every intention of killing him anyway.

"You're running out of..." Van Cleff continued.

When suddenly the room was plunged into darkness.

Reno didn't hesitate. His years of training as a Turk had honed his reflexes to respond immediately to any situation. He dove forward, at the same time twisting to the side. All the lights were out, and there were no windows here, but he had a pretty good idea that Van Cleff hadn't moved.

The gun fired, going off so close it left his ears ringing. He felt something graze against the side of his head. And then his hand shot out, grabbing hold of Van Cleff's arm. He twisted round, getting leverage on the man's arm, forcing it to the side. He grabbed hold of Van Cleff's hand with his free one. There was another loud retort as he forced the gun to go off, in the direction he hoped one of the guards still stood.

He continued turning, pulling forward, twisting Van Cleff's arm and knocking him to the floor, the gun spinning away in the darkness.

Reno felt a hand grab at his shoulder. He immediately brought his elbow back, into the midriff of the guard who was trying to grab him. The man left out of puff of air as it was forced from his lungs. Reno spun around and stuck again, hitting the man squarely in the face and sending him to the floor.

Someone grabbed his leg and tried to pull him down. But he escaped the man's grasp. He swept his leg around, and felt a satisfying thud. Van Cleff gave let out a cry of pain and fell back. Reno heard him scrambling away, sounding like he was on

his hands and knees. But Reno wasn't about to let him get away. By luck, he might just happen upon that gun somewhere on the floor. The man was making so much noise Reno didn't need any light to know where he was. He lunged forward, slamming a knee into the man's side. Van Cleff cried out again. Reno felt a kick hit him in the side of his leg, but it didn't hurt much nor do any damage. Without his gun, Van Cleff wasn't much of a threat. Reno reached out, grabbing hold of the man's shoulder. He brought his fist down again, on the back of the man's head, and Van Cleff sunk to the ground.

Reno looked up. It was still pitch dark. He had no idea what had happened, but he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth. Now was his chance to get out of here.

He made for where he was pretty sure the door lay. A moment before the darkness had been his friend, but now it was working against him. He couldn't move very fast in the dark, and the longer he hung around, the more likely it was that reinforcements would show up. He had to hurry, but he couldn't see a damn thing. If there had been a power outage, what happened to the emergency lights? He knew for a fact Vanguard headquarters had back up generators. It had been in the employee manual.

Groping his way forward, he managed to feel the door frame. He stepped through it. A light fell on him. He turned to look, then jumped back into the room as a shot rang out, pinging against the wall nearby.

"Shit!" he exclaimed.

The beam of a flashlight filled the hall outside.

"I had a feeling you wouldn't be so easy to get rid of," a familiar voice called out.

Reno paused just a moment before speaking.

"You're just full of surprises, aren't you Darsa?"

"You could say that," she replied. "Tell me Reno, how did you do it? I didn't think anyone could take out the power and the generators at the same time."

Again Reno hesitated. He had no idea how it had all happened. But if she wanted to think it was all planned by him, he wasn't about to disagree.

"It was a lot simpler than you'd think," he replied. Trying not to make any noise, he dropped to the floor, searching with his hands for Van Cleff's gun. The flashlight outside did not give off enough light for him to see anything in the room other than the dim outlines of the two guards lying by the door.

"Oh really?" she replied. "Why don't you come out here and tell me all about it?"

"After the reception you just gave me?" he replied. For a moment he wondered why she hadn't come into the room already. After all, he was unarmed, he was a sitting duck. But then he realized she didn't know that. She must have known Van Cleff had a gun, and Reno had obviously taken him out. She probably assumed he had the gun already. Which might have been why she had fired first.

Well, that was another thing he was perfectly happy letting her believe. Where the hell was the damn thing?

"Why don't you come in here so I can return the favor?" he called.

"Thanks for the offer, but I don't think that's necessary," she replied. "You can't get out of the room, and it's only a matter of time before order is restored here and help arrives. All I have to do is stand here and wait. I'm afraid if you want to get out of here, you're going to have to come out of that room, and soon."

Unfortunately, he had to admit that was the truth. He had to get past her somehow, and he wasn't going to be able to do that unarmed. That stupid gun had to be here somewhere.

There was a flash of light from outside. Reno's head shot up as suddenly the entire interior of the room was illuminated. He looked around frantically, but the lightning only lasted a moment, and he didn't see the gun before he was plunged into darkness once more.

What the hell? Did she have materia too? And if so, why was she using it?

But he didn't have much time to ponder, for suddenly he realized the light from the flashlight was getting closer.

Had she decided that he didn't have a gun after all? Was she calling his bluff? He didn't have time to think about it. In a moment she would be in the door, and he was defenseless. If she came in now he was a sitting duck. He scrambled over until he was right beside the door. His only chance now was to catch her by surprise as she entered.

She came in. For a moment he saw her shadowy figure, then he kicked out and the flashlight went spinning away. He stepped forward, jabbing at her head, but with catlike instincts she twisted out of the way, somehow managing to avoid the blow. At the same time her own fist shot out, striking Reno square in the nose. He fell back and banged against the wall.

But even as he did, it hit him how small the shadowy figure had been. Too small to be Darsa.

"Yuffie?" he blurted out.

"Reno!"

For a moment neither one of them said anything.

"I think you broke my freakin' nose!"

Yuffie shrugged.

"Sorry, I didn't know it was you," she said defensively. "You shouldn't have attacked me."

"Well, you could have said something!" he said angrily.

"I wasn't sure you were here," she snapped. "You could have said something yourself, you know."

"I thought you were Darsa!" he exclaimed.

"Who the hell is Darsa?"

"That girl that was outside," Reno replied.

"Do I look anything like her?" Yuffie replied.

"In case you hadn't noticed, it's *dark*," Reno shot back.

"Well, it wouldn't be if you hadn't knocked the flashlight out of my hand," Yuffie replied.

Reno just mumbled a curse.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he snapped.

"What the think I'm doing here? I'm rescuing you, you idiot!"

Reno just looked at her for a moment. The truth was, he thought Yuffie might make an attempt to save him, but he never thought it would work. Rather he assumed if she did she'd just end up getting caught too. He had hoped when he didn't show up that she would call Rude to get some help, but he hadn't really expected the impulsive ninja to do that. Could it be that she had actually worked out a coherent plan?

"You shut off the power?" he questioned dumbly.

"Well, it didn't shut off by itself!" she exclaimed.

"And how did you get all the way in here?" he questioned.

"Do you really want to stand here discussing this?" she asked. "The power's not going to stay off forever. It's only a matter of time before they fix it. Minutes probably. Don't you think it would be better if we got the hell out of here while we can?"

Reno nodded. What the hell was with her? She was being so...logical.

He stepped over and picked up the flashlight. It was still dark, and they needed to see. The beam swung toward Yuffie and stopped.

She was wearing a pleated navy blue skirt, a white shirt and pink tie. It looked just like a schoolgirl's uniform. Her hair was in pigtails.

For a moment he just stood there.

Then he burst out laughing.

"Oh shuddap!" she snapped. "It's a disguise!"

But he couldn't stop. Pigtails!

"You look like...you're...twelve years old!" he managed to say between gasps of laughter.

She took a step toward him, her face red with anger.

"I'm *supposed* to! It's a disguise, I told you. All the guards thought I was just a little lost girl. Which was exactly what I wanted them to think, until I kicked their ass."

Reno managed to finally get a hold of himself.

"Yeah, right," he said. "I just wish I had a camera."

"Can we just get out of here!"

"All right, all right, let's go," he replied, trying to sound serious, but still grinning.

They made their way out into the hallway, then ran down the corridor. Yuffie quickly led him through a maze of hallways.

"Do you know where you're going?" he questioned.

"I got in here, didn't I?" he retorted.

Suddenly the lights around them flickered and then came back on, making them start.

"Didn't take them too long," Reno muttered.

"Hurry!" was all Yuffie said.

They turned down another hallway, but stopped immediately when they saw half a dozen guards at the end of it.

"Halt!"

They spun around and ran the other way.

Yuffie made a dozen more turns, and by now Reno was convinced she had no idea where she was going, but it seemed pointless to point that out to her. He could only hope they would run into an area he was familiar with.

The pursuit was still behind them. In fact, it seemed like more had joined the chase. Reno could hear shouts from all different directions. It seemed only a matter of time before they were surrounded.

They ran past another hallway. Shots and the thudding of bullets against the wall told them the pursuit was closing in.

"You sure planned this out carefully," Reno managed to say.

"Oh shut up," Yuffie exclaimed. "You can't expect everything to go smoothly. You're out of that cell, aren't you?"

"For all the good it's going to do me," Reno said sourly.

They came around another corner. Nearby was a doorway leading into a stairwell.

"C'mon," Yuffie called out.

She ran to the door and flung it open. She started up the steps.

"Wait!" he said. "You're going up? We need to go down to get out of here!"

"They're going to expect us to do down," she replied, not stopping.

Probably true, but that didn't help them escape.

"So what are you planning on doing?" he protested. "We can't hide in here forever. They're bound to find us. We've got to get away."

"Would you just be quiet and come on!" Yuffie called. She was already out of site in front of him.

With a mumbled curse he pounded up the stairs after her. She obviously wasn't going to listen to reason. He had half a mind to go down anyway, but he followed her, even if it was against his better judgment.

Three floors up they came to the top, the sixth floor. Above that, there was only a ladder leading up to the roof.

Without hesitating Yuffie continued up the ladder.

"Where the hell are you going?" Reno questioned again.

She didn't answer. Reno was about to protest again when the door to the hallway beside him suddenly burst open.

Again his Turk instincts saved him. Before the guards could react he kicked the first one, sending him stumbling back into those behind him. Reno pressed forward, striking with his fists. Another man went down.

A shot rang out, and Reno felt a burning sensation in his left arm. He kicked again, sending the man who had fired the gun stumbling backwards.

Reno was out into the hall now. The three men in front of him were down, but he heard shouts and looking up saw a number of other guards running down the hall towards him.

He scooped up the gun that the man that had shot at him had dropped, then turned, grabbed the door he tried to swing it closed, but the body of one of the guards he had taken down was in the way. With a curse he kicked the man with his foot, but the man was much larger than he was and hardly budged.

He turned to run back in the stairwell, and ran smack into Yuffie, almost knocking the materia that was glowing bright green right out of her hand.

A moment later the familiar flash of lightning lit up the hallway, and with the cry, the guards fell back.

"C'mon," Yuffie yelled. "What the hell is taking you so long?"

"It's not that easy to climb when three men are on crawling all over you," he snapped back.

"Just hurry!"

She was already starting back up the ladder. Reno looked up and saw the night sky through the opening above. He still didn't see much sense in going up to the roof, but it didn't seem like they had much choice anymore. The lightning had slowed down those behind them, but he knew it would take a lot more than that to stop them.

He scrambled out onto the roof, looking around. He had had no way of keeping track of time in the cell. There had been no clocks or even a window. The stars and sickle moon low on the horizon to the west made it apparent it was night, but how late, he couldn't say.

Not that it had any significance.

The faint moonlight outlined a radio tower in the center of the roof, extended up perhaps ten more stories. A few large pieces of machinery were the only other structures in sight.

Reno slapped the door closed behind him, but he had no key to the lock. There was no way to secure it. They couldn't stop the guards from coming up, even if this was the only way, which Reno was sure was not the case.

"What do we do now?" he called out.

"This way!" Yuffie yelled.

She darted across the roof, headed in the general direction of one of the pieces of machinery. He heard a shout, and shots ran out. He turned back, returning fire with his own gun. Dozens of guards were pouring out of the door they came through, and more were appearing from other directions. He couldn't tell how many, but there wasn't any doubt it was a lot more than the two of them could handle.

He reached the machinery and dove behind it. The machine was only a few feet from the north edge of the building, and Reno found himself sprawled on the ground right beside the edge. He glanced down, then turned to look at Yuffie. He could see that she didn't have any climbing gear. And even with her purported ninja skills, he didn't think she could scale down the wall without any equipment, and he was certain he couldn't. It seemed like all she had done was gotten them trapped on the roof.

"So this was your plan?" he questioned.

But she wasn't paying attention. Instead he saw her concentrating on another materia. A red one this time.

"Tidal wave!"

In seconds the huge bulk of Leviathan appeared, shimmering over their heads in the darkness. The beast reared back its head, then with a roar unleashed its attack. Reno couldn't see their opponents, the machinery was in the way, but he was quite familiar with the damage Leviathan could do.

But still, he knew that wouldn't be enough.

For a few seconds after Leviathan faded away into the darkness, there was silence.

And then the gunfire rattled around them again, perhaps even louder than before. Suddenly the air was rent with light and a hail of sparks shot from the machine they were using for cover.

"Shit!" Reno yelled. "They've got materia too!"

The sparks abated, but a fire had started in the machinery. Now black smoke curled out of it.

Reno stepped around the side, fired a few shots, and retreated back. The guards had been close, much closer than he had hoped. It wouldn't be too much longer before they were overrun, even with Yuffie's materia.

"Stand back to back!" he called out. The enemy would be upon them any moment.

But Yuffie didn't seem to hear him. She was looking out over the edge.

"Yuffie!" he shouted.

She turned to look at him, then pointed.

Almost as if out of nowhere, a black helicopter suddenly appeared over their heads. Reno brought his gun up to fire.

"They're with us!" Yuffie yelled, pulling down his arm.

Reno just looked at her for a moment, then turned toward the helicopter again. It was right over their heads now, the blades kicking up dust all around them. He hadn't heard it approach, the din of battle had masked the sound of it. He shaded his eyes to block out the wind. A face appeared above him. He recognized Lai Li in the chopper, a moment before a rope ladder came tumbling down to them.

"Hurry up!" he heard her shout.

Reno didn't need any prodding. He grabbed hold of the ladder and scrambled up. Even as he did so a green light glowed above him, as Lai Li cast fire on their opponents. In spite of that he heard a few shots in the darkness behind him, but none found their mark.

In seconds he pulled himself inside the aircraft. He got a glimpse of Rude at the controls. A moment later Yuffie scrambled up behind him, pulling herself in before he could even get out of the way. They both ended up in a heap on the floor.

As soon as they were in the helicopter turned away, and in seconds the Vanguard building was disappearing into the darkness behind them.

Reno sat up, looking at Yuffie, who was practically in his lap. He couldn't believe it. Not only had she successfully infiltrated Vanguard to come rescue him, but she had contacted the others to get their help. She had done exactly what a level headed mature person would have done. It hardly seemed possible.

"Are you all right?" he heard Lai Li ask.

"Yeah," Reno replied absently, forgetting the ache in his arm. "You guys took out the power?"

"Lai Li did," he heard Rude speak for the first time. "She hacked into their computers and turned off the power grid. But it was all Yuffie's idea."

Yuffie looked at him with a big grin on her face.

"Yup, pretty good job of rescuing, if I do say so myself."

"Rescuing?" Reno said. "You didn't rescue me. I had everything under control before you showed up."

He may be stunned by the job she had done, but he'd be damned if he let her know that.

"Oh yeah, right," she snapped. "You're just saying that cause of all the times I've said that to you."

"No I'm not," Reno replied. "If you hadn't shown up, I'd have been out of there an hour ago, and with a lot less trouble than you put us through."

"Why you ungrateful ingrate!" Yuffie sputtered. "You are so full of it! Whatssamatter, can't handle the fact that a girl had to come rescue you?"

"Kid would be more like it," Reno replied, looking at her with a grin. "Pigtails. I can't believe it."

"I told you it's a disguise!" Yuffie snapped. "You know, you may have escaped from Vanguard, but it's still a long drop from this helicopter!"

"Are you threatening me?"

"Like there's anything you could do about it if I was!" Yuffie said.

"Like a little girl like you could hurt me!"

"You didn't say that before when I broke your nose!"

"You didn't break it," Reno responded. "I was exaggerating. And you caught me by surprise."

"So how would you like it if I finished the job now!" she snapped.

"I'd like to see you try!"

"Jerk!"

"Moron!"

Up front Lai Li sat down beside Rude, who just shook his head slowly.

"Sometimes I don't know why we even bother," he muttered.

AUTHORS NOTE:

Reno's dream sequence in this chapter might have seemed familiar to some of you. That's because it's based on the story Northern Lights by Tini and was used with permission. If you'd like to see the entire story, you can find it [here](http://www.icybrian.com/fanfic/tini.html). It's an excellent story, but be warned, it's a real tearjerker!

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090105222440/http://www.icybrian.com/fanfic/tini.html>